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Getting up to speed on inflatable dam plan

A QUOTE FROM a news story last week might have caught your eye.

"We will have a clean river, and we will have an inflatable dam."

Of course, when you realized who was speaking you might have tossed the paper aside.

U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski has been talking about riverfront improvements to the Susquehanna for more than a decade. He's been touting the dam even longer.

Still, this quote came with some cash - \$3.5 million. The congressman says that pile of money will be just the first of federal and state grants to fund the bulk of an estimated \$28 million project to stop sewage from sloshing into the river.

Kanjorski, ever the optimist when talking about the river's potential, said the cleanup can be done in four years.

And - voila! - once the river is clean enough for swimming, the dam can be built, Kanjorski says.

Of course, he's been saying similar things for a very long time. Still, with some recent dam developments, it could be time to sit up and take note of what the congressman's been promising.

Consider that:

¥ Officials on many levels of government now seem to be aligned in support of the river cleanup and riverfront improvement projects.

¥ A news story in mid-May told how the county Flood Protection Authority approved a \$23,600 bill to gather information needed to apply for permits to build the \$14 million dam.

¥ Kanjorski recently said those applications will be submitted in April. He reminded that Congress has appropriated money to build the dam.

¥ Almost a million dollars has already been earmarked to study the environment impact of the dam. That study is expected to be completed next summer. A separate feasibility study was done months ago.

¥ Representatives of the flood authority said the dam could be built by 2008.

Obviously, lots of people in power have been talking about the dam. So how do YOU feel about it?

Not sure? We understand. It's been hard to pay attention to what seemed like a far-fetched

idea. Your eyes might have glazed all that talk and no concrete.

Here are some refresher facts.

The dam is proposed for South Wilkes-Barre. It would create a pool as deep as 25 feet stretching north to the Wyoming Valley Airport in Forty Fort.

Some say the dam will hurt the river habitat, and only cause fetid water to rise closer to people and homes. Others tout the dam's seasonal, 4-mile-long, 400-acre lake as just the boost our area needs.

Opponents of the dam don't oppose a river cleanup, but they worry millions of dollars will be wasted on a dangerous, artificial, ecologically unsound lake. Proponents say as the water rises so will the economy.

Of course, that's only enough information to intrigue. We hope you want to learn more, while you can still have a say about the project.

Access to published Times Leader stories about the dam can be gained through our Web site, timesleader.com. Look for "Inflatable Dam Archives." You should also be able to link to these other sites from our site.

¥ The Wyoming Valley Inflatable Dam Project Feasibility Study and the Susquehanna Riverfront Project are described on the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Business and Industry Web site: www.wilkes-barre.org

Click on "Latest News" then "Project Updates."

¥ For a site that shows a real-live inflatable dam in action in Tempe, Ariz., check out: www.tempe.gov/rio/LakeHistory/dams.htm

¥ The world's largest inflatable dam, on the Susquehanna River in nearby Sunbury, can be seen at www.dcnr.state.pa.us/stateparks/parks/shikellamy.aspx

¥ Bridgestone, one of two manufacturers worldwide of rubber inflatable dams, has some neat schematics on its corporate Web site that show precisely how the dams work: www.bridgestone.co.jp/english/diversified/rubberdam/design.html

¥ Birders with the Greater Wyoming Valley Audubon Society voice concerns over an inflatable dam in Wilkes-Barre: For fastest results, do a Google search and type in Greater Wyoming Valley Audubon Society.

And if you don't have a computer?

Kanjorski's office in the Stegmaier building in Wilkes-Barre has a copy of the feasibility study. A secretary says you can read it if you go to Suite 400M.

Just be forewarned. You might not want to show up when the congressman's around. You

might be there a couple hours.

He really likes to talk this dam thing up.